DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 256 093 EC 172 091

AUTHOR Ferguson, Dianne L.
TITLE The Ideal and the Real: The Working Out of Public Policy in Curricula for Severely Handicapped Students.
PUB DATE Oct 84
NOTE 32p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Employment; Normalization (Handicapped); Productivity; Public Policy; Relevance (Education); *Severe Disabilities; *Teacher Attitudes; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Increasingly, new public policy requires that appropriate educational programs for severely handicapped student employ a functional approach to teaching content and prepare students for futures in competitive employment. This study examines how eight teachers' interpretations of this new policy shape their curricular decisions, and, in turn, might shape future policy. The teachers find that the demands of competitive employment and productivity reject many students who have too few marketable skills and too little time left to acquire them. Discussion centers on how teachers' attempts to reconcile student ability with productivity threaten the success of reform for many of the very students it is designed to help. (Three pages of reference conclude the paper.) (Author/CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED256093

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

The Ideal and the Real:

The Working Out of Public Policy in

Curricula for Severely Handicapped Students

Dianne L. Ferguson
Assistant Professor
The University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325

October, 1984

(1985, in press)
Remedial and Special Education, 6 (3).

EC172091

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Diane L. Ferguson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Increasingly, new public policy requires that appropriate educational programs for severely handicapped students employ a functional approach to teaching content and prepare students for futures in competitive employment. This study examines how teachers' interpretations of this new policy shape their curricular decisions, and, in turn, might shape future policy. The teachers find the demands of competitive employment and productivity reject many students who have too few marketable skills and too little time left to acquire them. Discussion centers on how teachers' attempts to reconcile student ability with productivity threaten the success of reform for many of the very students it is designed to help.

Janet Reynolds'[1] students spend every school morning working in cafeterias throughout the school district. Supervised by a teacher or assistant, as well as by a non-handicapped peer advocate, each student completes a routine of stocking the serving line with milk, silverware, straws and napkins.

Rachael Anderson's eight students sit at separate tables arranged in a large circle. Watched by three teaching assistants, they variously sort paint brushes by size, complete pegboards and ringstacks, or sort Peabody color chips.

In Matt Williams' class, ten students sit in chairs at empty tables. A TV in one corner plays soap operas, though no one looks at the screen. A stereo in another corner blares old Beatles tunes. It is "break time" for the students and lunch break for two of the four classroom staff.

These and similar scenes occur daily in secondary classrooms for severely handicapped students. Each of these students is receiving a "free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment" in accordance with established public policy and emerging local practice. Public Law 94-142 embodies public education's renewed commitment to equality. Yet the most cursory glance at the above examples suggests little obvious similarity among the curricula in use in these classrooms. Certainly the students differ: some talk easily, others not at all; some read and try to write; others move their bodies haltingly and with great effort. Still, large variations in approach and content of teaching for severely handicapped students seem only partly attributable to individual student differences.

An egalitarian public policy to admit such students into public schools has not yet led to the further step of a recognizable, coherent curricular approach to these newest students. The policy of "appro-

---

[1]All names of people and places are disguised to insure confidentiality.

priate education," embodied chiefly in the individualized educational program (IEP), requires only that instructional content choices occur for each student. Practicing special educators must develop a rationale for determining specific content for students who no one had previously believed could benefit from instruction, even to the extent of learning the "simplest routine of life" (Kirk & Johnson, 1951). The professional effort to gain public school recognition of severely handicapped students must now yield to the even more difficult task of deciding what to teach.

Academic educators' initial attempts to describe appropriate teaching content for severely handicapped students emphasized:

> The need, before anything else, to understand what ultimate role we have in mind for these children, and thus what kind of skills they really will require (Thomas, 1977, p. 1).

This focus on students' futures produced a new "functional approach" to teaching content, guided by a "criterion of ultimate functioning" (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976). Severely handicapped students should only be taught those critical skills they need to be active in their present and anticipated environments. This functional rationale now dominates as the preferred approach among academic educators for determining curricular content and evaluating the appropriate education for severely handicapped students (e.g., Sailor & Guess, 1983; Snell, 1983; Wilcox & Bellamy, 1982).

Part of what makes the functional approach unique is the requirement that teachers anticipate their students' future roles in society. Perhaps all teachers and approaches to education tacitly imply such a

requirement, but few, if any, to the conscious extent and degree of detail required by teachers of severely handicapped students. It is not enough just to articulate a future productive and contributory role. Students must learn to cross actual streets, ride actual busses, and perform actual work tasks that will fill their adult lives. Teachers must understand both their students and the community outside of schools in order to shape the content of their programs.

A growing number of academic educators and an expanding body of literature provide increasingly specific descriptions for future roles. Teachers are encouraged to begin preparing students for adult work as early as elementary school (Frith & Edwards, 1982, Note 2), and provide a broad variety of work experiences in nonschool, nonsheltered settings through junior high and high school (Brown, et al., in preparation). A corollary emphasis in the literature is that severely handicapped students be prepared for competitive work (Wehman, 1981). Competitive work is preferred for two sets of reasons: 1) cost efficiency (Brown, et al., in preparation; Hill & Wehman, 1983), and 2) quality of life.

> Paid employment offers opportunities to expand social contacts, contribute to society, demonstrate creativity, and establish an adult identity. The income generated by work creates purchasing power in the community, makes community integration easier, expands the range of available choices, enhances independence, and creates personal status (Will, 1984, p. 2).

All other adult alternatives, including sheltered employment, volunteer programs, personal assistance programs, and work activity programs, are considered discriminatory, exploitive, ineffective and cost-inefficient (Brown, et al., in preparation).

In their cumulative effect, such efforts to guide teachers' curricular choices for severely handicapped students amount as much to an elaboration of policy as to a specification of practice. This illustrates that reciprocal process by which policy and practice mutually inform each other. When one finally moves past the initial policy statement and the academic educators' translation of this policy into practical guidelines, then one finds that the final arbiters are those who deliver the policy's promised services. New public policy intends to alter the practices of those providing service. The service providers' interpretations of the meaning and intent of such reforms serve, in turn, to further modify the original policy.

For example, how are teachers like Janet Reynolds and Matt Williams implementing the functional approach to curriculum in their decisions about what and how to teach their students? How does Rachael Anderson interpret the goal of competitive work for students who have only a few remaining years of schooling? And why do Rachael Anderson's and Janet Reynolds' interpretations of competitive work appear to differ? Finally, does the growing dominance of the functional teaching/competitive work interpretation of "appropriate education" expand or limit teachers' assessment of their present curricular choices?

This study examines these questions by interviewing teachers. By taking as data the meaning of curriculum to teachers, the study explores what and how these teachers teach, why they chose to focus on some particular content, rejecting others, what guides their choices and how they explain these choices. In effect, how is new public policy for severely handicapped students reflected in the curriculum-in-use in secondary public school classrooms for severely handicapped students?

Further, how might these teachers' interpretations of present policy in turn shape future policy?

Methods and Participants

The research employed a qualitative research approach in the theoretical tradition of "symbolic interactionism" (Blumer, 1969; Becker, 1970; Note 1), and a multi-subject, "modified analytic induction" design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Also called naturalistic or ethnographic, this research approach focuses on understanding the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people. That is, what people do and say is a product of how they interpret their world as they experience it. The focused interviews (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954) used in this study permitted the interviewer to elicit teachers' own experiences, perspectives, and interpretations about curriculum in their own words. Taped interviews lasted from one to three hours. Analysis of complete interview transcripts after each interview revealed emerging themes, topics, and issues for subsequent interviews with the same or a different teacher. Each teacher participated in at least two interviews.

Eight teachers participated in the study. All the teachers described their students as severely handicapped. Some described themselves as "a severe/profound teacher." Each has had several teaching experiences and frequently discussed these other experiences to compare, clarify and amplify their comments about their current classes. The teachers range in age from early 20s to 50s. Their formal teaching experience varies from just beginning to 20 years. Four work in regular public secondary schools and four in segregated public special education

schools in a Northeastern state. A school administrator suggested the first teacher participant. This participant and subsequent participants suggested others.

The Teachers' Work

While these teachers of severely handicapped students disassociate themselves from both their regular and special education colleagues in some ways, they also ally themselves in other ways. The content of their work may be different, but their objective is a shared one. As all their educational colleagues, they engage in preparing their students to function as adults. Gwen Farris admits that much of what she actually does, like

> changing diapers, feeding . . . doing daily living skills--things that none of the other teachers in the building would do with the other [non-disabled] kids--it's not really the classic teaching model, but it's what they need. It's the program that's most effective for them.

Dave Schofield, too, finds that

> buried in what people are doing with regular ed students is the goal of ultimate student independence, responsibility and ability to contribute to society . . . of making people responsible citizens.

Without exception, the teachers share this vision of independent, contributing futures for their students. At the same time, all distinguish their work from that of others by how directly--how functionally--the content of their teaching prepares their students for these "independent futures." Unlike regular education students, these teachers' students cannot be taught "math here, reading there, civic

duty here." They cannot "take all that [learning], switch it around in their minds, put it together again, and go out and function."

The teachers' simple descriptions of their workday reveal much about how they prepare their students to "go out and function." Theirs are not days partitioned by reading and math groups, social studies, science, and recess. Instead, they talk of teaching grooming, home economics, community skills, vocational or work study skills, domestic activities, leisure skills, and shop, all as part of a single day.

Even more variation in the meaning of functional teaching is contained in teachers' descriptions of specific teaching content. Sometimes functional is defined negatively as not doing ditto sheets or other "inappropriate" tasks. Specific learning activities can be "made" functional by doing them at natural times, such as learning how to put on a jacket only when you're going to go outside, or practicing how to ask for food and drink only at meal times. In some classes, not doing things is a functional skill to be learned:

> The most important thing I could come up with for Aaron in socialization was to learn not to belt somebody when he's out in public.
>
> In Chris' case . . . I'm more interested in just having him able to work at any task for a few minutes without yelling or banging the table. With him I'm working on using his leisure time appropriately.

Self-help skills are frequently described as a priority. "Teethbrushing-toileting-handwashing" becomes a single word, followed in priority by dressing, eating, and the preparing-a-meal/setting-a-table/washing-dishes cluster. Community activities such as crossing neighbor-

hood streets, buying something in a store, using a vending machine or telephone are emphasized by some teachers, while others focus more on functioning in school by learning to use the paper towel dispenser, open the two-part latch on the school's front door, use a locker or bathroom pass, or simply finding your way from the classroom to the bus.

For some students, academics are functional when they involve such skills as knowing coin values, using a calculator to add up purchases, telling time, writing your name, or reading words like "in," "out," "exit," "dairy," "meat," and "bakery" when you encounter them outside of school.

All of these examples and more constitute "functional teaching" content. They are all things the teachers described as important for their students to know, and directed toward realization of their "independent" futures. Still unclear, however, is why one teacher chooses to emphasize sorting skills and another community skills and how such choices reflect teachers' interpretations of an appropriate education guided by a functional teaching/competitive work rationale.

Deciding Who to Teach What

As with most decisions, many different factors can exert influence and must be considered. Some factors were less amenable to teachers' manipulation or interpretation. Factors like class size, availability of desired materials, or number of assistants seem destined to constrain teachers' decisions and focus their work in particular directions. The following example illustrates.

> What do I need? More resources and materials. I don't think these are necessarily the appropriate materials for us to be sorting. We're doing what we have available to us, [but] give

me something that's more appropriate. . . . Something that maybe is useful. Something that, if we could teach them to do it, would maybe be productive to the world. Give me something that would make them useful to society. I mean, sorting Peabody color chips isn't going to do anything for society.

Differences in students can figure significantly in decisions about who gets taught what. Despite the fact that the teachers consider most, or all, of their students severely handicapped, in one way or another, all find that their students are on significantly different levels:

There are definitely levels, but I don't know if I can define them. By level I mean there are high and low and medium and so on. And even at every level there are levels inside of those that you can classify kids by. So when I say Randy is very low level, I mean he learns much slower than Patrick.

In fact, the meaning of functional teaching and functional learning has as much to do with the <u>type</u> of students the teachers perceive themselves teaching as with their content decisions. Students are constantly described in comparison to others as either "higher" or "lower functioning." The specific content of functional teaching and the teachers' visions for their students' independent futures vary with the category into which they classify their students. Thus, students' group membership becomes a strong influence on teachers' curricular decisions.

That the teachers make distinctions among students designated severely handicapped is hardly surprising. Recently the group of severely handicapped students has been broadly described as "students who comprise [<u>sic</u>] the lowest intellectually functioning 1% of a par-

ticular age" (Brown, et al., 1983). The range of students this 1% standard might include is substantial. And there certainly have been other attempts at definition emphasizing such factors as behavioral characteristics (Abt Associates, 1974), service needs (Sailor & Haring, 1977; Sontag, Smith & Sailor, 1977), or ability to preserve life in face of danger (Baker, 1979). It seems obvious to the teachers that the group of students described as severely handicapped is extremely varied. Despite a pervasive rhetoric of individualization, however, teachers "sort" students into groups for which a matching set of curricular content is clear to them.

Types of Severely Handicapped Students

Teachers' assignments of students to various groups are not systematic or perhaps even intentional. However, their descriptions of students, accounts of how they make decisions about teaching content, and speculations about students' future lives reveal that the sorting of students into various "types" rests on three key dimensions. First, teachers make some assessment of a student's present abilities and skills, along with the expected potential for achieving any significant change in his or her behavioral repertoire. Second, teachers gauge the ease with which they can teach the student. That is, will the student accede to teacher demands, or must teachers apply strong controlling measures to achieve student compliance and conformity? More generally, is the student a behavior problem or not? Finally, teachers' predict or anticipate the type and amount of work the student will be capable of performing as an adult. Teachers informally use these three dimensions to sort students into five separate groups or "types." Each "type" of student not only requires different "functional teaching," but such

program content prepares each group of students for different anticipated futures of independent functioning.

Talkers and Walkers

The first type of student can walk, has some degree of academic skill and is verbal--even talkative. This is a student who not only understands much of what is spoken, but can reciprocate with conversation. These are students for whom personal care skills are not an issue--they are "independent toileters" and "self feeders." "It is not a population who have a lot of motoric difficulties." Instead, teachers focus on how and how much academics to teach. They describe these students, for example, this way:

> Their program focuses more on functional skills. On such things as meal preparation, some rough focus on leisure skills. Most of the academics tend to be more functional--sight word reading vocabulary, following recipes, counting money, telling time--more functional kinds of things like that.

Functional academics, like other functional skills, can be used. Reading skills might reach a level that will permit a student to read for leisure. But more often there is a decision point when teachers feel they must decide not to continue with "developmental academics [those taught in regular education], but to veer off and do something else."

> It's a difficult decision with this particular population. Jim, for example, was learning multiplication facts and actually making a pretty good rate of progress. You probably could predict that with a couple more years of programming he could learn his division facts. But I just don't know why to teach that. I don't know what the practical applications would be.

For some of these students, the decisions become superfluous as they near the completion of their schooling. Another teacher describes why only functional application, not new acquisition, of academic skills remains important:

> Most of the students are 18. The academics we do are very functional and are minimal. Because I think at this age their academic skills don't develop very much. What they have is pretty much what they're going to have so it's mostly just maintenance and to make it more functional.

The future for this type of student seems clear, if not always easy to realize: they will work for wages. Teachers talk of "motel work," working in cafeterias or other food service jobs, "on a maintenance crew in an apartment complex, supervised in, say, groups of five or six," or working in industry. There is an expectation that these students might require quite close supervision and support, but also that they will work at jobs "similar to the jobs mildly handicapped kids have had some success getting employment in." They will have choices. A variety of jobs will be available. And they will "be out in the community more . . . rather than all of them going to sheltered workshops."

Some teachers describe a progression of vocational alternatives culminating in an expanding number of community-based jobs:

> That's how it's set up in the community: the vocational programs are progressive. Like, you have a day treatment program and there are sheltered workshops. . . . Then now, they have jobs out in the community in actual work sites . . . . They use levels. If they can work to a certain criterion for one level, then they're passed on to the next level where they have more career options.

Others reject some of these same options in favor of preparing their students for only community-based vocational alternatives.

> I think a tremendous amount of what I do here relates to vocational functioning. I guess as a citizen most people feel that if you are able to work that you [are] making a contribution. To me work doesn't mean that people have to be able to produce 100% of what a typical employee would produce. What work would mean for my students is being able to produce something in a supported, supervised, non-sheltered setting. When I say non-sheltered setting, that's different than competitive employment. Many of these students are not going to produce to the extent where they will get minimum wage. But I think substandard, subminimum wages are an okay thing.

Regardless of whether the teacher conceptualizes a continuum of physical settings or one of support and supervision in a single kind of setting, these students are expected to work--probably in integrated community settings--for at least substandard wages. This is the future for which their functional educational programs must prepare them.

Walkers

The second type of student also walks, though many need some assistance due to motoric difficulties. Some walk slowly or awkwardly, with atypical gaits. This group of students is generally considered non-verbal, though most either vocalize or use some alternative form of basic communication like manual signs, gestures, or communication boards. Unlike their more verbal peers however, these students communicate little, either in substance or frequency. They are

people who don't understand what you say--have to be communicated to in a different sense. A lot learn very well physically. They don't understand what you're saying so it's useless to talk to them--well, not totally useless, maybe they'll pick up after a while, but you can't depend on it because they don't understand what you're saying.

Functional learning for these students has nothing to do with academics, not even "functional academics." Their programs focus on a different content, a "simpler" content:

> Teaching a kid to put on socks, put on shoes, go to the bathroom, brush teeth, wash hair, bathe. Maybe simple domestic tasks like set the table, clear the table, or wipe the table off. Maybe learn to make a bed. Simple things like that.

This type of student can be unattractive, especially as a teenager. Descriptions vary from "he's really strange," or "he's definitely split level," to

> His teeth are all rotten. It's gross. He's one of the harder ones to warm up to because he's not physically attractive and he's not a good worker. He doesn't have much of a personality.

Teachers' decisions for this type of student rarely involve a rejection of any regular education content. Such options are irrelevant to these students' current repertoire and potential. Instead, teachers decide which "basic life skills" students can acquire and in what order. While some start with dressing skills as a priority, others might emphasize communication or toileting.

"Independent futures" for these students are harder for teachers to envision as work for wages, even substandard wages. There are many

unique problems that must be solved. One student is banned from cafeteria work for spitting into the food. Another cannot do maintenance work in the school because he makes noises that disrupt classes. Then, too, it takes so long:

> Partial participation, I think, rather than independence is the thing. You can train them given enough time. But from what I've seen of these kids, just putting milk in a cooler--it's been three years with just slight changes. . . . You don't have time to keep training and training.

Over time the feasibility of working futures begins to diminish for this type of student. Teachers cast around for alternative future visions for which to prepare their students. Those that conceive of adult vocational alternatives as a kind of ladder requiring increasing skill independence in exchange for greater options find "functional" work to mean sheltered workshop tasks and alter their functional teaching accordingly.

> We've done pretty much food service and maintenance. . . . The training you now see is different, now that my class has gotten more severe. We want to try some other training because not it would be good if they could do sit-down, sheltered workshop tasks. If they could do that it would be functional for some of them. . . . Like, putting tokens in a bag. I have severely retarded kids that could be doing that and it would be a functional job for them.

Still others completely redefine the function of work from producing things for society and earning even substandard wages, to "busy work," designed to ease care.

> The workshop skills for these kids are mainly things to occupy them. If they can be set down to a simple task of sorting that will relieve staff to work with someone else. . . . I don't think anybody's skills in here are ever going to be high enough to be qualified for any sort of an organized workshop. There are two hep [for hepatitis] carriers in the room. They wouldn't be allowed to work on any project that would go out, for health reasons. . . . We're mainly giving them something to do, something to occupy their time.

These students' skills, together with their less promising work futures, leave teachers both with few alternatives for which to prepare their students and fewer present curricular choices. Choices center on whether to teach assembly, packaging, or sorting tasks and if they should be taught before or after students acquire independent self-care skills or some reliable ability to communicate.

Behavior Kids

The third student "type" is really a special category of the previous two: the "behavior kids." They are not just "kids with behavior problems," but large, older students with behaviors that involve possibly serious physical risk to themselves or others. They are "tough kids," "violent kids," and "self-abusers." The students become identified and classified by their behaviors. One teacher described her class this way:

> I do have a very tough class. I have kids that pick up desks and throw them. I have a lot of kickers, a lot of hitters. I have a couple of head bangers. I have two or three biters.

"Behavior kids" are a subcategory of the first two groups because, except for their behavior problems their other skills represent the range of both of these groups combined. Some behavior kids work on "functional academics," have "terrific work skills" and are quite verbal. Others are not verbal and have few academics, but are large and can be threatening when they "act out." This group also constitutes a subcategory because they all walk, and conversely, because students in wheelchairs cannot be "behavior kids."

> Because they're in a wheelchair. Because they just can't--they physically can't get at you. That's mostly what behavior kids are considered: kids that can physically get at you.

This group of students possesses the full range of the abilities and skills held by the first two types of students, as well as the potential futures. However, unlike the first two student types, teachers of "behavior kids" cannot pursue parallel curricula. Behavior kids are "harder" to teach because they are harder to control.

These students have frequently "already flunked out of four or five other classrooms" because other teachers cannot handle them. So they are "dumped in behavior management classes" without regard to needs other than behavior control. New teachers must "get them under control" before they can return to less restrictive settings. In their special

classrooms, they are "structured," "disciplined," "managed," "sat on," even tied to chairs. One problem with this approach, for both teachers and students, is that too often, successful control leaves teachers little time or resources to address acquisition of positive, adaptive skills. In some classrooms for behavior kids, a student's entire program is geared to eliminating some specific behavior, because "you've got to cure the behavior first. [They] can't comprehend a new task and behavior at the same time." But despite a shared conviction that careful, systematic intervention over time will succeed, most teachers of behavior kids remain puzzled and frustrated by little success.

> Initially I think you have to control them. But then you have to get them to take over the control. But, how do you teach that? Especially to someone that you can't talk to? How do you communicate through body language that "You have to learn to control yourself. It's the best thing for you. If you don't, you may have a hematoma one of these days and die from self-abuse." I say to myself, "What's he going to be like twenty years from now? Is he still going to be banging his head against the nearest thing?" If he is, is it worth it? Is it worth putting all of the psychological and physical energy that I put into him for a year and a half just to see him go on going that for the rest of his life?

"Behavior kids" possess fewer future options:

> My class is in trouble. I can only probably see one of my kids high enough for a workshop, but he'll never get there unless he gets his behaviors under control. And he's 19. I can't see him getting them under control in two years.

Since these students rarely transfer to other classrooms successfully, they seem trapped in programs of "protective custody." Another teacher speculated about this directly:

> A lot of my doubts are about, "Am I teaching or am I controlling?" If I'm not teaching, why am I a teacher in a classroom? If I'm a good controller maybe a residential coordinator would be a better position. I could ensure their safety for a longer period of time.

Work for wages, even "busy work" seems a slim possibility for "behavior kids." Their need for safety, for protective custody, overrides and eventually supplants other possible functional learning content and other independent futures.

The "Non-Ambs"

The fourth and fifth groups of students are both seriously physically handicapped. None walk, some rarely move at all. Many have bodies so twisted and contracted by years of neglect that adaptive motoric function is nearly inconceivable. More often, their lives have been confined to a single bed, or piece of mat, in an institution. They have received few services: no therapy, no education, only minimal custodial care. Most of these students are considered non-verbal, but have fewer communication alternatives, either because of motoric, cognitive, or technological/economic restrictions.

These physically handicapped students constitute two "types" of severely handicapped students because some are thought to be "bright" and capable while others are not. Teachers speak with hope about finding ways to free some students from their recalcitrant bodies--hope tempered with reality:

> They really feel that Steve has more mental capacity, more intelligence, than has been tapped. He's 14. Essentially quadriplegic. He does move his arms from time to time, but not in any sort of consistent, intentional way. Now understand--I don't think we're looking at a brainchild here who's been locked in his little shell so long and we've only just discovered how to get him out. But I do think he can learn to deal better with his situation and the world around him.

Sometimes the sheer magnitude of these students' time and equipment needs can be daunting, even when teachers have a pretty clear idea of what to do:

> We felt he needed an overhaul from his previous program. Like a new wheelchair. He doesn't have a communication system so we're working on a computer system. We were advised to get an Apple II computer, but then we have to get all the hardware and software. Some people are still working on how to get the money to do that. It's all still in the works.

Often teachers are much less certain of what is functional teaching for this group of students. It is not always easy, even possible, for teachers to find the "key."

> Joe's got a great personality. If he wasn't so physically involved, he could do a lot more than he does. . . . He's got good intellectual function-- higher than some of the other guys in the class, but he just doesn't have the physical skills to complete a lot of the tasks that he could do. It's hard.

Students' physical limitations alter the entire focus of teaching content. Some choices, like teaching vocational and personal care

skills, are not considered functionally appropriate--not in aid of preparing these students for the future. Students are "in diapers, of course," not working on toileting or dressing because they are "not capable," such skills are "inappropriate." While teachers agree that work will not be in their students' futures, they have difficulty envisioning alternatives. The students' physical limitations appear so profound that little seems feasible.

> Vocationally he's just very limited. I don't think there are really any vocational options for him. . . . That definitely helps persuade me to the type of program I've developed for him: mostly maintenance of his physical skills. . . . Right now I don't know [about his future]. It would probably only be a day care program--if they even take him because of his health care needs and functioning ability. Academically, or intellectually, he is almost TMH. But performance-wise--So I don't know. It will be bleak.
>
> For Jeff--he is incapable for being expected to do any kind of work. He's just so physically involved. He knows how to do a tremendous lot of things, but he can't do them. For him I would gear things more toward leisure--trying to teach him some games. Mostly getting him to interact with other people.

There is still one last group of students: those who also have serious physical handicaps, but are considered less cognitively able. Few, if any, of this group are in public schools yet. All the teachers spoke of them, but as being in other, segregated, institutional settings. Teachers describe these students as "more multiply impaired," "more profoundly handicapped," "kids that have even fewer skills," and

"extremely multiply profoundly handicapped individuals." For one teacher, teaching itself, let alone "functional teaching," seems inappropriate for these students.

> With these guys, I don't know. It doesn't seem like teaching. Just trying to elicit responses is not teaching. Matt--I can't see teaching Matt, who doesn't respond to anything. The only kind of responses he has are startle reactions. . . . To me it's not teaching. I don't know what you'd call it. [You're] not even in control of the responses they're making.

For these students the notion of functional teaching fails utterly. Teachers see no way such students can ever functionally do anything. There are no curricular decisions to be made by teachers because there are no functional alternatives for these students. Educational uncertainty extends to future uncertainty. Most who speculate at all describe futures of "total care" with goals of "maintaining their health," "keeping them comfortable and free of pain," or "making them happy."

Discussion

These new public school teachers quickly seize the policy elaborations of academic educators are begin to shape new functional curricula guided by the new future goals of non-sheltered competitive employment. Yet when the teachers carefully examine these future goals for their students, their interpretation, and subsequent curricular content, is much less unified. Community-based living and participation in community domestic and recreational activities seem "feasible" for most. But non-sheltered, competitive employment seems feasible for only a few. The teachers find the policy reform does not accommodate all the

students they know as severely handicapped. Its demands reject many students who have too few marketable abilities and too little time left to acquire them. The teachers' new categories and classifications reconcile students' ability with work, with the result that many become doubly damned as both severely handicapped and unproductive.

When between 50 and 80 percent of working age adults who report a disability are jobless (Will, 1984), the "meaningful work" (Brown, et al., in preparation) for most severely handicapped adults is, at best, a synonym for unskilled, entry level jobs for which there is increasing competition from handicapped and non-handicapped workers alike. As new sophisticated technologies and robotics claim even these jobs at an increasing rate, will "meaningful work" become redefined as "a series of actions that if not performed by a severely handicapped person, would be performed by a robot"? Will "ongoing supported employment" result in trivializing the meaning of work for handicapped people and end in creating newer forms of discrimination, isolation and negative imagery?

In the end, the teachers' final translation of policy reform into practice reveals that the reform fails because it does not reform enough. Although many students increasingly live, learn and participate in typical, complex, heterogeneous communities, too many do not and will not. As long as we persist in employing old normative standards of work, productivity and contribution, in measuring human worth in dollars earned for labor, insisting that every person earn a portion of their keep, we assure that some will fail.

Future policy reform must heed the interpretations of these teachers and create alternative commonsense meanings of work that do not newly stigmatize the work of severely handicapped people. One way to

accomplish this would be to create notions of work and foster work settings in which the economic dimension is at least diminished and where membership and worth are less dependent on economic productivity. Such efforts on behalf of severely handicapped people can only assist a longer term, broader cooperative effort to alter the dominance of our society's economic sphere to one that is non-competitive and non-alienating for all its members.

NOTES

1. For a more extensive description of qualitative methodology and its uses in educational, see Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, and Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).
2. Brown, et al., (in preparation) recommend that direct vocational instruction begin no later than age eleven and consist of a minimum of a half day per week.

REFERENCES

Abt Associates. (1974). Assessment of selected resources for severely handicapped children and youth. Vol. I: State-of-the-art paper. Cambridge, MA: Abt Associates, Inc.

Baker, D. B. (1979). Severely handicapped: Toward an inclusive definition. American Association for the Education of the Severely and Profoundly Handicapped Review, 4(1), 52-65.

Becker, H. S. (1970). Sociological work: Method and substance. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bogdan, R. (1972). Participant observation in organizational settings. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. (1975). Introduction to qualitative research methods. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Brown, L., Nisbet, J., Ford, A., Sweet, M., Shiraga, B., York, J., & Loomis, R. (1983). The critical needs for non-school instruction in educational programs for severely handicapped students. Journal of the Association for the Severely Handicapped, 8(3), 71-77.

Brown, L., Nietupski, J., & Hamre-Nietupski. (1976). Criterion of ultimate functioning. In M. A. Thomas (Ed.), Hey, don't forget about me! Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Brown, L., Shiraga, B., Ford, A., Nisbet, J., Vandeventer, P., Sweet, M., York, J., & Loomis, R. (in preparation). Teaching severely handicapped students to perform meaningful work in nonsheltered vocational environments. In R. Morris & B. Blatt (Eds.), Perspectives in special education: State of the art. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman.

Frith, G. H., & Edwards, R. (1982). Competitive employment training for moderately retarded adolescents. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 17, 149-153.

Hill, M., & Wehman, P. (1983). Cost benefit analysis of placing moderately and severely handicapped individuals into competitive employment. Journal of the Association for the Severely Handicapped, 8(1), 30-38.

Kirk, S., & Johnson, G. (1951). Educating the retarded child. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Maccoby, E., & Maccoby, N. (1954). The interview: A tool of social science. In G. Lindzey (Ed.), Handbook of social psychology. (pp. 449-487). Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.

Sailor, W., & Guess, D. (1983). Severely handicapped students: An instructional design. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Sailor, W., & Haring, N. G. (1977). Some current directions in education of the severely/multiply handicapped. American Association for the Education of the Severely and Profoundly Handicapped Review, 2(2), 67-86.

Snell, M. E. (ed.). (1983). Systematic instruction of the moderately and severely handicapped, 2nd edition. Toronto: Charles E. Merrill.

Sontag, E., Smith, J., & Sailor, W. (1977). The severely/profoundly handicapped: Who are they? Where are we? Journal of Special Education, 11(1), 5-11.

Thomas, M. A. (1976). Hey, don't forget about me! Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Wehman, D. 91981). Competitive employment: New horizons for severely disabled individuals. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Wilcox, B., & Bellamy, G. (1982). Design of high school programs for severely handicapped students. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishers.

Will, M. (1984). Bridges from school to working life. Programs for the Handicapped, March/April (2), 1-5.

Author Biography

Dianne L. Ferguson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Dept. of Counseling and Special Education
The University of Akron
Akron, OH 44325
216-375-7779

Dianne Ferguson, Assistant Professor, University of Akron, received her Ph.D. from Syracuse University. The research reported in this article is part of a larger study of curricular theory. Dr. Ferguson continues to pursue research and teaching on issues in policy and programming for severely handicapped people.